



# A CHRISTMAS QUEEN.

BY MARTHA M'GILLICHO WILLIAMS.

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Aunt Charlotte came sturdily across the Lee plantation. The fields were all sere, as became mid-December. Yet in the flower garden roses, pansies and chrysanthemums were rapidly unfolding in the warm, slow rain, rather ragged and discolored, to be sure, but flowers for all that.

"Dem's de v'y things fer dressin up table," Aunt Charlotte muttered to herself as she scolded betwixt the borders and on to the back porch. Before she could knock, the hall door opened, and Mrs. Lee called out:

"Howdy, Aunt Charlotte? Come right in my room to the fire. You'll catch your death yit, running about in so bad weather. Sit down and dry your feet while you tell me all the news."

Aunt Charlotte stuck her torn, muddy shoes toward the blazing logs, fetched a sort of grunting sigh and said: "La, Miss Ma'y, you know I never hears no news, but dey nor'ated it at church meeting 'stiddy dat ole lady Brantley was metty low wid de brown-shooters, an ole Miss Calshaw's Florence had done runned off an married dat Dadd boy."

"Well, well, she has driven her ducks to a bad market. Girls are so foolish. Oh, did you hear from old Mr. Pogram? I am told he was badly hurt last week."

"Yessum; he clumb up de stable lof, he huntin fer de boyes jug er licker, an fell through on dat young mule, an de critter kicked him. So de doctor say de spine er he back is querralized."

"Dear me! You don't say so!" Mrs. Lee returned.

For an hour the talk slipped along the channels of local gossip. Aunt Charlotte knew there was nothing like tidbits of news to put Miss Ma'y in good humor. Whatever happened in ten miles around was reported, with enlargement and variations, at the colored church. Besides Aunt Charlotte herself was outdoor laundress for some half dozen families, so of course knew all about them. When her feet were dry, she got up, picked her sunbonnet from the floor and said, balancing herself on one foot:

"Well, I'ms be goin. Miss Ma'y, is you got any goss paper?"

"Let me see. Yes, I think—I know I have. Do you want some? Are they going to have another Christmas tree at the church?"

"Yessum—no'm. I does wants some, but 'tain't fer no Christmas tree. Dey done had so many er dem, an fesservils, an May suppers, an so on, de folks is tired on um. Miss Pasco, de teacher at de free school, an misty high lant. He been one session ter de Frisk university, up hat Nashville, so de church call on him ter pervent um soup'n now. An he tote um dey mus' have er queen er Christmas."

"Indeed? That is something new. Tell me all about it."

"I ain't zactly got de whole thing straight yit, but fer es I kin make out my Meely—dey choosed her fer queen—is givins be dressed up in white, wid er crown on, an red shoes, an set up on er cheer on top de teacher's table, wid er big stripe-de shawl all hangin down ter de flo, an de schoolchilluns is ter come up fore her an say dey speeches—"bout de boy stood on de burnin deck, an twinkle, twinkle, little stars, an de reaper whose name is debt, an all dem yothers. Den dey gwine have di-logs fer de big chilluns, an arter dat de ole young men will march an sing around her, an she'll ter chose one on 'em fer king. Dat's what gits Meely whar de wool's short. You know she ain't forward lek de yother girls."

"No; Meely's a good girl—the best I know. Is that all?"

"Oh, no'm. Dey gwine have er supper, set in de schoolhouse eend er de church. Dat'll be 50 cents an eat all you wants er barbecue an pie. De church don't git none er dat; hit all goes ter dem whar vides de vittels. But de side table whar dey gwine sell cake an candy an reasons an oranges an seegars will be all fer de paschure sal'ry."

"Sides dat he git de dime at de do' too. De church owes him \$40, an dey dem ter promiss ter git up comp's would make it fer him. Christmas, fore he'd 'gree ter baptize, any er dem las' converts. He loved his body was des as well with savin as dey souls, an he wasn't gwine ruint his las' suit er clothes in de water 'dout he had de insurance er gittin money ter buy mo'."

"I see. Does it come off Christmas eve?"

"Oh, no'm. Hit's gwine be Saddy night in Christmas. De yother churches an school 'taintments will be through by

den, so we git er big crowd. De s'city from town—de Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise, say dey comin out ter see how us country niggers does, an I wants ter 'stonish um good one time sho."

"You want me to help you?"

"Yessum; I be metty proud er you will. I got three dozen eggs. If you des let me have de sugar an butter an flour, I'll make two cakes fer de side table an bake um in your big rosepans. An I thought maybe you'd len me de money ter git Meely's dress an shoes, an make de crown fer her, an len me you buggy blanket ter go over de cheer. Ef you will, hit'll be er mighty big 'commemoration."

"Has Meely outgrown the white dress I made her last summer?"

"No'm, but it's been washed. 'Sides hit never was nothin but swiss muslin. Now she got ter have tariton. Teacher say queens don't never w'ar nothin else, an never puts one on dey back but des de one time. Hit's bout ter be right now."

"You had better get her yellow shoes. She can wear them afterward."

"Teacher say dey mus' be red—dat's what de town niggers will be speetin, an dey shan't have no sense ter laugh ef I can help it."

"You want me to make the dress?"

"Yessum, ef you will."

"And the crown?"

"Ain't nobody but you would do it fer me."

"Do you want it like this?" showing a picture of a royal diadem.

"No'm," said Aunt Charlotte. "De chilluns is gwine w'ar silver ones when dey say dey speeches an Miss Pasco he made um one fer er pattern. Hit's des er han big 'nough to go on de head, wid sharp p'intes stannin up around de top. Meely's mus' be dat way, too, only goss an bigger."

"H-m-m! Is that all you want?"

"Yessum—'ceptin 'tis dem flowers out yonder in de garden. An I'll sweep de yard, an make your soap in de spring clothes, an iron all Miss Lucy's nice clothes next summer."

"I know you will, you blessed Aunt Charlotte," said Miss Lucy Lee, running in with her arms full of finery. "And Meely shall be as fine as Friday in this tarlatan dress of mine—I've only worn it once—and a red sash and stock-



ings as well as the shoes. And her crown shall have 17 tiny sharp points to it, one for each year of her life and mine. You know we were born the same day, and have grown up jast the same size."

Aunt Charlotte beamed all over.

"God love you, Miss Lucy! You is one good child. I was thinkin 'bout dat dress all de way ober here—studdy up how I could git it. If your foots des wan't so little dat Meely couldn't git mo' fer her big toe in your shoes, I'd ax you fer dem white slippers and let de red stockin's do."

"Oh, she shall have shoes—never fear!" Lucy said, holding the sash to the light. "But how will she get to church without spoiling them? It's a mile from your house, and the mud will be knee deep. You know it always rains a week when the wind is in the south."

"Yessum, hit's gwine be bad. Dey done 'cided at church meetin dat Meely mus' dress in de clostes' house, dat an den come out, an be set up in er no top buggy, an have eight er de big boys pull her up ter de church do'. Den Miss Pasco, he gwine take her outen hit an tote her up de aisle an set her in de cheer on de table."

Lucy laughed aloud. Her mother frowned and said, a trifle sharply: "I would not allow that, Charlotte. Meely is no child."

Aunt Charlotte looked at the floor in meek obsequy.

"Dey tells me queens don't walk none 'tall," she said, "an de buggy can't git no nigher 'an de do'."

"Then let two of de big girls make a bee saddle and tote her. That won't look half so bad as to see Pasco lugging her like an old cat does her kitten."

## B. B. BITZER

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Mrs. Lee said, still sharply.

"It's the hugging, not the hugging, ma objects to," Lucy said through her laughing, "but that does not matter. I believe Mr. Pasco wants to marry Meely."

"He do," said Meely's mother, "but she don't set her min on dat ar 'onditions. Peto Meacham, who've got no 'ligion 'tall, is des always whistling an potillions an singin 'bout

"Oh, Master Rabbit, yo' years mighty long. Yes, my dear, dey are set on wrong."

Dat's what make me try so hard ter git her fix up nice fer dat yere time. I'm givin' git all de things an den tell ter she can't have um 'dout she'll 'gree ter take Miss Pasco."

Lucy's eyes flashed, but before she could speak her mother said:

"Well, I hope you'll succeed, but it does seem to me that when a girl sets her heart on a trifling, no account fellow there is no use trying to change it. I didn't know Meely was like the rest, but I'll help you all I can."

"So will I," said Lucy, running away, with scarlet cheeks. Meely's case was her own. Bert Wilmer had her heart and her truth plighted; rich Dave Allen, the backing of her parents. Possibly it was this fellow feeling that made her so wondrous kind to Meely. Possibly also the fact that Peto had been postman for the lovers ever since Bert was forbidden the Lee house had something to do with the case.

Then, too, the Lees were a habitual provender to the poor blacks about them. Love for the merry, careless, simple-shrewd race was in their blood, comprehension likewise. They saw under the grotesque extravagance of the "queen of Christmas" a germ of self reliance and furthered it accordingly.

When at last it came to pass, Lucy, with her brother and a dozen more young folks, stood outside and looked on through the window back of the pulpit. The church was a big log structure, lit with kerosene lamps in flaring tin reflectors, and fairly crammed with dark humanity.

Besides the country negroes for miles around the Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise were out in full regalia, a hundred strong. Each brother wore a red sash crossing his breast, with a tin star over the heart, a green apron turned up with yellow, and a blue and white rosette upon the left lapel. Each sister was gorgeous in a purple cape, a long white, froily ruffled apron, deep red sash about the waist and orange turban with green plumes. They marched to their allotted places, droning out a weird, wordless chant, and vainly tried to maintain an attitude of solemn criticism. The crowd was dotted with smiling, familiar faces, the savory scent of barbecue was in the air, and Brudder Paschere, otherwise the Rev. Mr. Barker, shook hands up and down the benches with a fervor that almost set them shouting.

Presently the deacons hustled and squeezed the crowd back from the aisle, and Mr. Pasco came through with Meely in his arms. She was a slim slip of a girl, but he staggered under her mounting and would have fallen when mounting to her chair throne if Peto Meacham had not sprung forward and relieved him of his burden.

"Umph! My Lord! I wouldn't have dat nigger fer soap grease ef he can't tote no better'n dat!" exclaimed the foremost Daughter of I Will Arise, while one of the country lads murmured: "Lord! Wouldn't I des jk ter see 'im put 'gust Peto at er kol ligin! He done stay dar in dat schoolhouse twell he ain't no stronger'n er skelter."

Meely reached her throne about equally crumpled in clothes and feelings. While the speeches and dialogues went on she sat trembling and half blind, only kept from running incontinently away by the knowledge that her mother's eye was on her. She knew what was expected of her—that she would choose

Mr. Pasco as king—and she hated him so! If only she might choose Peto! But he would not be in the line. Aunt Charlotte had managed to have him left out. After he put her in the chair he sat down on the pulpit floor back of it,

and Lucy Lee, and in less 'time than it takes to write it they had likewise entered the holy estate of matrimony. Peto and his boss, it seemed, had planned a double runaway. The happenings of the evening only precipitated the crisis.

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SENT HIM SPRAWLING TO THE FLOOR.

where the drapery hid him from the crowd, but let him look his fill at her. That was her only consolation. If they tried to make her bodily over to Mr. Pasco, he was close at hand, and Miss Lucy and Marise Bert looking in at the window, ready to give him countenance for her protection.

At last the march began. Two by two, a man and woman, they came into the small clear space before her and moved around singing:

My Lord called Sister Martha, Sister Martha would not answer, Sister Martha's into de garden, Talkin' about my Lord.

Five minutes of slow, heavy stamping; then came a wild whirl to

Dar war ban's o' mause, Dar war ban's o' mause, Dar war ban's o' mause, Rumbula fro de sky.

Then the words died away to a wild groaning shriek, with a tempest of foot-falls under it. The marchers formed a wheel with the women in the center and whirled at top speed in front of and up to the poor distracted queen. The pastor came, too, with an oily smile, and put his buggy whip in her hand, saying: "Now, Miss Permeely, hit your king and lemme set him down yere 'side you. Hit is not good fer 'oman ter be erlone, de Scripture says, Now, shot your eyes an hit de nex' whar 'er passes." With that he seemed to release the whip, yet adroitly flung the lash around Pasco's neck. Instantly there went up a great laughing shout, and by the time Meely had drawn one sobbing breath the teacher was beside her, holding her hand. The preacher had drawn a book and a folded paper from his pocket and was beginning to read that the document authorized him to solemnize matrimony betwixt Cesar Augustus Pasco and Pamela Mills.

Out from the wonder stricken crowd came a shrill cry: "O-o-o! you vilyunt! I hain't dead yet!"

The next minute a small and vicious looking Daughter of I Will Arise streamed up to the throne, clutched the royal bridegroom and shaking him till his teeth chattered cried out: "I married dis yere slab sided, low-down, no 'count triflin' fly up de creek two years ergo, up to Nashville, an took in washin ter spote 'im so he might go ter school an git book sense enough ter be er preacher. An dis is what I gits fer it. Fine um yere tryin ter marry er gal 'at don't 'ant um an does 'ant some body else. I been knowin ever sence he runned away wid me mean as gar broth thickened wid tadpoles, but I never did thought he'd come quite ter sech er pass as dis."

Mr. Barker put on his most judicial aspect. Pasco's countenance betrayed his guilt. Nevertheless the minister asked:

"Is this woman your wife, Brother Pasco?"

"I married her once, but I was a minor then, and I propose to get me a divorce next spring—as soon, in fact, as school is out," Mr. Pasco said, calling all his grammar to his aid.

"Den you better wait till you git it fore you try ter marry agin," Peto Meacham said, catching his rival round the waist and sending him sprawling on the floor. Then he gathered the sobbing Meely in his arms and turned to face the preacher, saying: "Mr. Paschere, my boss is got license fer me ter marry dis same little gal. Git um from him, please, an tie de knot right yere. I was gwine stee her as we went home, but I don't want take no mo' risks er losin' er."

Then a wonderful thing happened. The party outside came in and stood in a half circle, back of Peto and Meely, until they were made one, when a grave gentleman, whom nobody quite knew, stepped in front of Bert Wilmer

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## A LESSON IN BOXING.

The Young Man Who Saw a Sign, Afterward Saw Stars.

A Detroit young man who has been taking in Chicago tells this story and tells it well:

"I saw a sign of 'boxing and gymnastics' on stairs, and I went up simply to see what sort of a place it was. There were only a few people up there, and one of them was a young man with a black eye, and a dejected countenance. As he seemed to be unhappy, I felt it my duty to speak to him and see what I could do to make his path more pleasant."

"I'll tell you what's de matter wid me," he explained after a bit. "I was a boxer here two or three days ago wid de St. Joe Kid, as he calls himself, and he struck me fowl and blacked me eye. I'm a layin fur him here, dis mornin, and if he comes, say, I'll put him to sleep in de middle of de first round. I'll show you how he hit me."

"He got up, pulled off his coat and vest and pulled on a pair of gloves, and about this time I remarked:

"I'm perfectly willing to take your word for it. You needn't go to any trouble to demonstrate."

"Oh, it's no trouble at all. Come into de ring, and I'll show you how he did it."

"But, you see, I—"

"Come into de ring. What's de use of ashin about me eye if you don't want to know how de kid blacked it?"

"He had gone to considerable trouble on my account, and I felt it was only fair to step into the ring."

"Now, den, put up your dukes," he said as he squared off at me.

"But, my dear sir, I never—"

"Put up yer dukes. Do you want me to knock yer jaw off at de very first clip?"

"It looked to me as if he was an only child and not used to being crossed, and so I put up my dukes to keep him good natured."

"Now, prance around," he said as he began to dance and skip and feint at me.

"What's the use?" I protested. "I can stand still while you explain matters."

"Prance, I say!" he yelled.

"It seemed policy to humor him in his absurd threat, and so I began prancing."

"Dat's de iden," he called as he dodged about. "Now, den, hold yer right a little lower. Dat's it. Up a little wid yer left. Dat's de way."

"But, I assure you, my dear fellow, that I didn't want to humiliate myself."

"Lead for me wid yer left!"

"What for?"

"Lead for me, I say. Do you want to stand there like a chump and let me do all de work?"

"But as he was willing to take the risk I led for him. I expected to knock him head over heels, but he was still circling around me after I got through leading. This astonishing fact led me to remark:

"I think I will go now. You got to be down at de Palmer House in just five minutes. I can plainly see now how the kid—"

"Swing yer right fur me jaw!" he yelled as his dancing and prancing grew more vigorous.

"But I don't want to break your jaw."

"Swing wid yer right!"

"He had requested me to kill him, and I swung. I was wondering what the coroner's verdict would be when the roof fell in and everything turned dark. It was eight minutes afterward, as a small boy with a very beautiful face informed me, when I awoke and found the roof all right. The boy and I were the only ones in the place, and he said my jaw wouldn't bother me over two weeks. He was a good boy. He rubbed me with liniment, brought me a glass of brandy and afterward helped me down stairs and called a carriage and told the driver what hospital to bring up at."

—Detroit Free Press.

Shelley married an innkeeper's daughter, who proved uncongenial. He left her, and she committed suicide.

NEW YORK, Jan. 5, 1888.

I have seen Rose several times and shall say goodby tomorrow. I do all I can for her, but nothing on earth can render her life any more bearable. As for God's reward for what I have done, I can hardly appreciate it. "His more like punishment for misdeeds (de which I've done many) than grace for good ones (if I've done any). Homelessness is the actor's fate, physical incapacity to attain what is most required and desired by such a spirit as I am slave to. If there be reward, I certainly am well paid, but hard schooling in life's thankless lessons has made me somewhat of a philosopher, and I've learned to take the buffetings and rewards of fortune with equal thanks, and in suffering all to suffer—I won't say nothing, but comparatively little. Dick Stoddard wrote a poem called "The King's Bell," which fits me exactly (you may have read it). He dedicated it to Lorimer Graham, who never knew an unhappy day in his brief life, instead of to me, who never knew a really happy one. You mustn't suppose from this that I'm ill in mind or body. On the contrary, I am well enough in both. Nor am I a pessimist. I merely wanted you to know that the sugar of my life is bitter sweet—perhaps not more so than every man's whose experience has been above and below the surface. Business has continued hard and increases a little every night. The play will run two weeks longer. Sunday at 4 o'clock I start for Baltimore, arriving there at 10 o'clock. Tomorrow morning I'll be in the city, and artists at breakfast to discuss and organize, if possible, a theatrical club like the Garrick of London.

WEIGH WITH THEIR EYES.